



**Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service**

Protecting Our Community

COMMUNITY INFORMATION BULLETIN NO. 21

HOARDING AND FIRE SAFETY

Hoarding is defined as collecting or keeping excessive amounts of various items in and around the home. It is classed as a mental disorder that can be triggered by a traumatic event or be a symptom of another disorder, such as depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, or dementia. Hoarding can significantly affect a person's quality of life, making it difficult to get around the home, whilst also posing a significant health risk.

Hoarding is a particular issue for the Fire Service due to the accumulation of material in the home causing potential issues such as increased fire loading, the blocking of escape routes and the risk from falling debris making firefighting and the search for occupants more difficult.

If you do store large amounts of possessions in and around the home, you can help keep yourself safe by following this advice:

- Make it a priority to keep the area around the cooker clear;
- Do not place combustible items close to heaters, lamps or other electrical equipment;
- If you smoke, use a proper ashtray and place it on a flat, stable surface; empty the ashtray regularly and never leave cigarettes unattended;
- Put candles or tea lights in a heat resistant holder on a flat, stable surface; never burn a candle on or near anything that can catch fire; keep burning candles away from furniture, curtains, bedding, carpets, books, paper, etc;
- Do not store gas cylinders in your home as they are a serious hazard during a fire;
- Do not stack items to a height that they become unstable;
- Ensure all internal doors can be closed, particularly before going to bed at night;
- Make sure you have a working smoke alarm and test it regularly;
- Plan and practise how to escape from your home if there was a fire; and
- In the event of a fire, do not attempt to put it out yourself – leave your home immediately and call the Fire & Rescue Service once you are safely outside. Do not stop to collect possessions and never go back inside once you have escaped.

If you think that a family member or someone you know may need some help or assistance with hoarding then try and persuade them to speak with their GP.

If there are concerns regarding hoarding then contact Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service to arrange a free 'Home Fire Safety Check'. The visit will give firefighters a chance to offer fire safety advice for your home and make sure you know what to do if there is a fire and how to escape safely.

For further information phone NIFRS HQ 028 9266 4221 or visit www.nifrs.org



#STOPfire